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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 004203

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STATE FOR S/CT, PM, EAP AND EAP/MTS
USPACOM ALSO FOR FPA HUSO
SECDEF/OSD/ISA/AP (LAWLESS/TOOLAN/BAILEY)
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [EAID](#) [RP](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR VISITS MEDCAP/GETS FIRST-HAND LOOK AT
ON-GOING ANTI-TERRORISM OPERATIONS ON JOLO

REF: MANILA 3914 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: (U) Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney
for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C/REL AUS) Summary. Ambassador had a first-hand update from ground force commanders on the Armed Forces of the Philippines' on-going effort to capture or kill Abu Sayyaf Group and Jemaah Islamiyah leaders during her September 25 day-long visit to Jolo Island. The Armed Forces of the Philippines shows no sign of giving up its pursuit, and praised US assistance, saying it had directly contributed to the successes thus far. A separate visit to a Philippine medical mission in the village of Buanza, a former Abu Sayyaf stronghold, showed a community eager for economic development and ready to cut its ties to terrorists. End Summary.

BEGINNING TO TURN A CORNER

¶2. (SBU) Task Force Comet Commander Brigadier General Ruben Rafael in his September 25 briefing at Camp Bautista drew comparisons between the present effort on Jolo and earlier operations in 2002 on the neighboring island of Basilan. Like Basilan, civil military operations, such as engineering projects and medical care, provided a means to physically and psychologically separate the terrorists from the population and complemented ongoing USAID development projects in infrastructure, health, and education. Rafael pointed to a September 1 resolution by Jolo community leaders denouncing terrorism and the Abu Sayyaf Group and supporting the Armed Forces of the Philippines' operations as proof that the Armed Forces of the Philippines was beginning to turn the corner in its fight against the terrorists.

¶3. (C/REL AUS) Rafael said regular dialogue with and visits to Moro National Liberation Front commanders had helped defuse tensions, resulting in an informal agreement that the Moro National Liberation Front would not interfere with Armed Forces of the Philippines' operations. Rafael commented that one Moro National Liberation Front commander, Habier Malik in Panamao, was now actively cooperating with the Armed Forces of the Philippines, including providing information on Abu Sayyaf Group movements. Mistrusting each other and fearful they would be sold out, the Abu Sayyaf Group and Jemaah Islamiyah were forced to remain constantly on the move, never staying more than 24-48 hours in one place.

RELENTLESS PURSUIT

¶4. (SBU) Since the onset of "Operation Ultimatum" on August 1, Rafael said the Armed Forces of the Philippines had kept the terrorists on the defensive through a relentless series of pursuit operations, including 25 separate clashes with the Abu Sayyaf Group/Jemaah Islamiyah in which the Armed Forces of the Philippines had suffered 14 soldiers killed and 89 others wounded. Rafael put the number of confirmed Abu Sayyaf Group casualties at 24 killed, 14 wounded, and another 8 captured. (The actual number of Abu Sayyaf Group casualties is believed to be far greater, but has not yet been confirmed.) Both he and Major General Cedo, the Commander of Western Mindanao Command, pledged to keep the fight until Khadaffy Janjalani, Abu Solaiman, Dulmatin, Umar Patek, and other senior leaders were either captured or killed.

U.S. HELP PRAISED

¶5. (C/REL AUS) Ambassador expressed her deep appreciation for Armed Forces of the Philippines efforts, saying that the United States was proud to help the Armed Forces of the Philippines rid Jolo of terrorism. Both Rafael and Cedo praised US assistance, citing specifically help with intelligence fusion, medical evacuations, medical civic action programs, and subject matter expert exchanges designed to improve the combat skills of the Armed Forces of the Philippines units. Brigadier General Juancho Sabban, the III Marine Brigade Commander, also praised US Light Infantry Battalion training, saying that US-provided skills had directly contributed to the success of the current operation. The one US-trained Marine battalion had adapted the doctrine

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and tactics it had learned to the fight on Jolo and was providing the bulk of the troops hunting the Abu Sayyaf Group. Calling this type of training and equipment "very, very effective," Sabban said, "It's what we need," and noted that he hoped more such training would be possible in the future.

PROSPERITY CEMENTS PEACE

¶6. (U) The Armed Forces of the Philippines-sponsored MEDCAP in Buanza, only two months earlier a terrorist stronghold, showcased what Jolo could become once the terrorists are defeated. The civilian community, many of whom came from Moro National Liberation Front areas, warmly greeted the Ambassador. They are eager for medical care and economic development. Provincial Administrator Don Arbison Loong noted the high incidence of poverty on Jolo, where life expectancy was 20 years lower than the national average. Peace and stability offered people a better chance at life and the opportunity to escape from the bondage of poverty. Observing that this was her fourth visit to Jolo, the Ambassador said prosperity would cement peace, stressing that the United States is seeking active ways to be a partner in development. She pointed out that USAID spent \$4 million annually on Jolo, and had already invested nearly \$1 million in road, education, and health improvements in the area surrounding Buanza.

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KENNEY